Research Paper | Education | E-ISSN No : 2454-9916 | Volume : 8 | Issue : 5 | May 2022

BUILDING ACADEMIC RESILIENCE: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION

Dr. Cory Ross

Provost, George Brown College, Toronto, Canada.

ABSTRACT

George Brown College (GBC) has undergone a process to build academic resilience into its academic portfolio of programs. GBC through the process of appreciative inquiry values the input from all its stakeholders. Engaging in discussions with all the stakeholders in an open and collaborative forum will generate innovative ideas for the advancement of the College.

KEY WORDS: education industry resilience technology i4.0 workplace.

INTRODUCTION:
To ensure that GBC remains a leader in Polytechnic education within Toronto it is essential to strive for continuous improvement. By aligning our initiatives with the changing needs of industry and employers, GBC will remain on the cutting edge of delivering a very current high impact education to our students. Analyzing and evolving the College's academic roster of programs will ensure a level of quality, currency and authenticity that will serve our graduates well in positioning them with a competitive advantage once they enter the workforce. The development of a resilient academic plan is one process by which the College can achieve its mission and flex to the ever-changing forces in industry.

As we explored the various means to foster academic resilience, we looked at our most recent past and the 10 year strategic plan 2010-2020. Strategy 2020 identified six imperatives that acted as institutional priorities. The priorities were:

1. Prepare diverse learners for job success
2. Be an enabler of the innovation economy
3. Invest in the creation and stewardship of high value and high performing partnerships
4. Leverage state of the art technology
5. Build a high performing organization
6. Build a sustainable financial and resource model

STATE OF INDUSTRY AND EMPLOYMENT:
Currently the new state of affairs in industry and employment world, is being heralded as "the 4th industrial revolution (i4.0)." The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, confirms that "The accelerating pace of technological, demographic and socio-economic disruption is transforming industries and business models, changing the skills that employers need and shortening the shelf-life of employees' existing skill sets in the process."1 This trend is characterized by a digital transformation of industrial manufacturing and management. In order to understand how we got to this point educationally it is important recount the transformational journey. The following highlighted trends have created seismic shifts in the thinking and practice out in the industrial and employment world. Some key disruptors affecting industry and employment world have shaped the transformation. The movement towards quick access education that is self paced, often free, and specific to the needs of its users has become common place. Arriving in 2008, MOOCs evolved from offering how-to courses towards offering content that is relevant to the world of work with courses ranging from machine learning and data analytics, to communication and leadership training. This trend has not gone unnoticed by industry. Companies have begun moving corporate training and employee upgrading to online learning platform as they require little or no investment, have no travel costs and are less disruptive to employee productivity2. Corporate-run education is also finding its place in the new fast paced digital revolution. Systems and technologies are changing at an unprecedented rate resulting in corporations offering in-house education programs or industry hosted training factories that specialize in the skills and knowledge areas needed specifically to improve the effectiveness and productivity of its employees. This will also serve as a recruitment incentive to potential new employees.

CONCEPT OF PERIPATETIC CAREER PATHS:
There is a growing trend away from life-long employment towards holding multiple jobs, typically within freelance contracts. According to Workopolis, Canadians can expect to hold roughly 15 jobs within their career or even change careers completely several times over.3 This trend however is not necessarily the result of a slowing economy but rather the effect of the rapidly changing nature of work in i4.0. The current trend towards digital transformation is all around us, ubiquitous in nature and thus academic institutions must respond with resilience and agility. People will still have a role in i4.0. While much of the actual "doing" will pass to machines or things, these systems will continue to need a human touch to guide them. People will still be needed to guide and provide oversight for the increasingly autonomous technology. In i4.0 the ideal employee will be specialized in their own areas of expertise, but also be universally well versed in the soft skills needed to help shepherd the emerging innovations. This will be the role of post secondary institutional training and education. In other words, Industry i4.0 workers will need to be agile enough to retool their skill sets. They will do so by either reworking and remodeling old ones as well as learning new skills to fit the evolving needs of employers and the increasingly digitized workplace.

DIGITAL DISRUPTION INNOVATORS AND THE SHARED ECONOMY:
Innovation expert, Clay Christensen, defines disruption innovators as "a product or service [that] takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors."4 In the i4.0 context, this is seen when a new digital technology and business model affects the value proposition of existing goods and services.5 While digital disruption can be considered of economic and social benefit through providing better access to goods and services, its effects on market flow and employment patterns are profound.6 For example, digital technology has allowed new companies to overtake much of existing markets, seemingly overnight, by tapping into shared resources that were previously unavailable. The result is massive economic disruption across large economic sectors including, transit, media, retail, hospitality and food services to name a few.

CONCLUSION:
On embarking on the next 10 years at GBC, we will craft a Vision 2030. What we have learnt over the last 10 years and in particular with the Covid pandemic that it is very hard to predict the future. Through the latest disruptions academic centres have begun their transformation in bringing about a change to the way they view curriculum. Curricula will evolve with the changes occurring in the workplace. No more will we see stagnant curricula passed down from generation to generation but rather curricula will be seen as an everchanging recombinant evolving to meet the changing landscape of industry. Once this is achieved, academic institutions will reach the status of a living learning ecosystem.

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